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## Merrimack Middle School Teacher Wins UNH Award for Dedication to Air Quality Research and Education

By [Amy Seif](#)

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DURHAM, N.H. , For her dedication to educating school children on forest health and scientific research techniques through the University of New Hampshire's Forest Watch Program, Ann LaCroix, a life science teacher at Masticola Middle School in Merrimack, is the first to be awarded the Gary Lauten Award.



**Ann LaCroix receives  
Gary Lauten Award  
from Barry Rock**

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The award honors Gary Lauten, a UNH research scientist and former coordinator of Forest Watch, who passed away a year ago.

"This award recognizes Gary's commitment to making science accessible in the

classroom," says Barry Rock, director of Forest Watch and professor of natural resources at UNH's Institute for the Study of Earth, Oceans, and Space, who presented the award to LaCroix. "He loved the program and became its heart and soul."

Lacroix is one of more than 250 teachers across New England who have been trained by the program in forest research techniques and how to involve their students in research on the impact of ground-level ozone (smog) pollution on white pines. The Forest

Watch Program is primarily funded by the New Hampshire Space Grant Consortium.

"Ann LaCroix has been a member of Forest Watch from our beginnings in 1992," says Ryan Huntley, coordinator of Forest Watch. "She's been very supportive of the program and puts a lot of effort into getting good quality data from her students while teaching them about forest health issues."

Each year, LaCroix and co-teacher Rick Glatz involve seventh graders in eight weeks of field research in the woods behind the Mastricola Elementary School. Students measure tree heights using scientific measurement techniques and mathematical formulas and collect pine needle samples for analysis by UNH researchers.

"I teach that accurate data is very important," says LaCroix, who has pushed for the improvement of the program at her school. "In the first two years of the program, we had to bus students to a town-owned wooded area to find white pine stands. Then in 1992, the site behind the Mastricola Elementary School was chosen for us to have frequent access to the trees. The Merrimack School Board further helped support my partnership with UNH by setting aside this site as a protected area from future development."

The needle samples taken by the students are sent directly to the university, where they are tested for signs of exposure to high levels of ozone.

"Within 10 days after sending in our samples, the university quickly supplies us with information, and we get to discuss the results with the same group of students who collected the samples," explains LaCroix. "The kids know that the reason they are collecting this data is because it is going to count in research that could possibly affect air quality laws."

For more information on Forest Watch, go to <http://www.forestwatch.sr.unh.edu/>.

**Editors and reporters: Ann LaCroix is currently teaching the Forest Watch segment of her class, and she welcomes reporters to make arrangements to visit them in the classroom and field.**

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